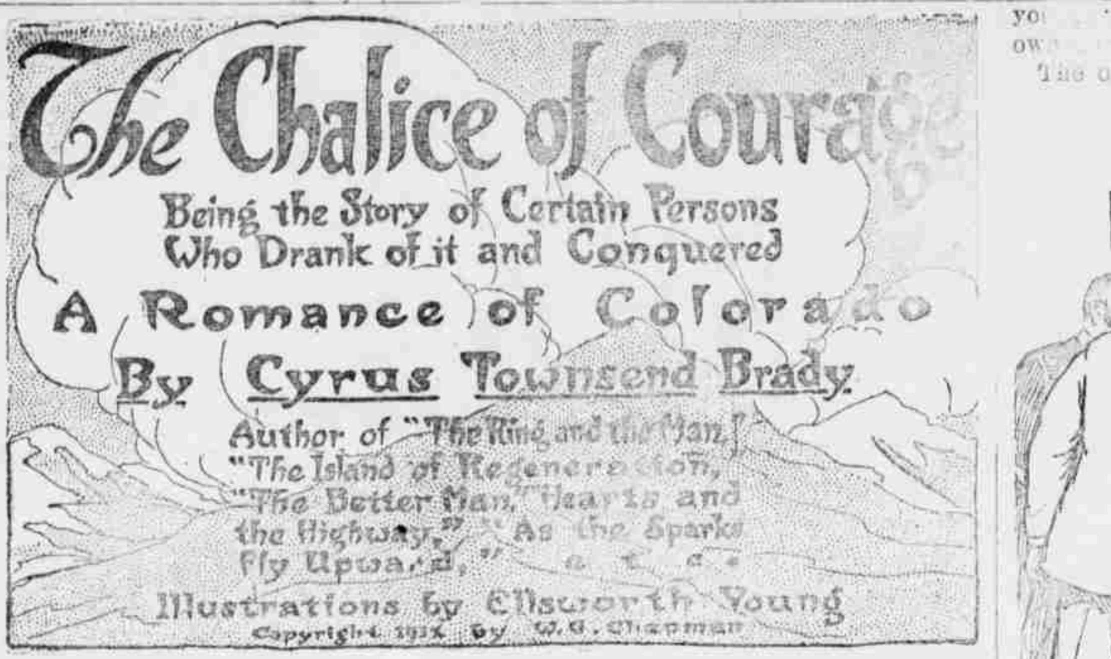

SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I.—Edith Maitland, a frank, free and unspoiled young Philadelphia girl, is taken to the Colorado mountains by her uncle, Robert Maitland. James Armstrong, Maitland's protege, falls in love with her.

CHAPTER II.—His persistent wooing thrills the girl, but she hesitates, and Armstrong goes east on business without a definite answer.

CHAPTER III.—Enid hears the story of a mining engineer, Newbold, whose wife fell off a cliff and was so seriously hurt that he was compelled to shoot her to prevent her being eaten by wolves while he went for help.

CHAPTER IV.—Kirkby, the old guide who tells the story, gives Enid a package of letters which he says were found on the dead woman's body. She reads the letters and at Kirkby's request keeps them.

CHAPTER V.—While Enid is bathing in the river in fancied solitude, a big bear appears on the bank and is about to plunge into the water to attack the girl when a shot rings out and the animal is killed by a strange man.

CHAPTER VI.—Enid is caught in a storm which wipes out her party's camp. She is dashed upon the rocks and injured. The strange man who shot the bear finds her unconscious and carries her to shelter.

CHAPTER VII.—Members of the camping party realizing that Enid is lost in the storm institute a frantic search for the missing girl.

CHAPTER VIII.—No trace of her is found and word is telegraphed to her father. James Armstrong is asking the father for Enid's hand when the telegram arrives expressing the belief that the girl is dead. Armstrong says he will find her, and Maitland agrees to their marriage if he succeeds.

"No," answered the other, "the quicker the better, as you say, and we can head off George and the others that way."

They searched the pile eagerly, prying under it, peering into it, upsetting it, so far as they could with their naked hands, but with little result, for they found nothing else. They had to camp another day, and next morning they hurried straight over the mountains, reaching the settlement almost as soon as the others. Maitland with furious energy at once organized a relief party. They hurried back to the logs, tore the jam to pieces, searched it carefully and found nothing. To drag the lake was impossible. It was hundreds of feet deep and while they worked it froze. The weather had changed some days before, heavy snows had already fallen; they had to get out of the mountains without further delay or else be frozen up to die. Then and not till then did Maitland give up hope. He had refrained from wiring to Philadelphia, but when he reached a telegraph line some ten days after the cloudburst, he sent a long message east breaking to his brother the awful tidings.

And in all that they did he and Kirkby, two of the shrewdest and most experienced of men, showed with singular exactitude how easy it is for the wisest and most capable of men to make mistakes, to leave the plain trail, to fail to deduce the truth from the facts presented. Yet it is difficult to point to a fault in their reasoning, or to find anything left undone in the search!

Enid had started down the canon; near the end of it they had discovered one of her garments which they could not conceive any reason for her casting off. It was near the battered body of one of the biggest Grizzlies that either man had ever seen, it had evidence of blood stains upon it; still they had found no body, but they were as profoundly sure that the mangled remains of the poor girl lay within the depths of that mountain lake as if they had actually seen her there. The logic was all flawless.

It so happened that on that November morning, when the telegram was approaching him, Mr. Stephen Maitland had a caller. He came at an unusually early hour. Mr. Stephen Maitland, who was no longer an early riser, had indeed just finished his breakfast when the card of Mr. James Armstrong of Colorado was handed to him.

"This, I suppose," he thought testily, "is one of the results of Enid's wanderings into that God-forsaken land. Did you ask the man his business, James?" he said aloud to the footman.

"Yes, sir. He said he wanted to see you on important business, and when I made bold to ask him what business, he said it was none of mine, and for me to take the message to you, sir."

"Impudent," growled Mr. Maitland.

"Yes, sir, but he is the kind of a gentleman you don't talk back to, sir."

"Well, you go back and tell him that you have given me his card, and I should like to know what he wishes to see me about, that I am very busy this morning and unless it is a matter of importance—you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"I suppose now I shall have the whole west unloaded upon me; every vagabond friend of Robert's and people who meet Enid," he thought, but his reveries were shortly interrupted by the return of the man.

"If you please, sir," began James hesitatingly, as he re-entered the room, "he says his business is about the young lady, sir."

"Confound his impudence!" exclaimed Mr. Maitland, more and more annoyed at what he was pleased to characterize mentally as western assurance. "Where is he?"

"In the hall, sir."

"Show him into the library and say I shall be down in a moment."

"Very good, sir."

It was a decidedly wrathful individual who confronted Stephen Maitland a few moments afterward in the library, for Armstrong was not accustomed to such cavalier treatment, and had Maitland been other than Enid's father he would have given more outward expression at his indignation over the discourtesy in his reception.

"Mr. James Armstrong, I believe," began Mr. Maitland, looking at the card in his hand.

"Yes, sir."

"Er—from Colorado?"

"And proud of it."

"Ah, I dare say. I believe you wished to see me about—"

"Your daughter, sir."

"And in what way are you concerned about her, sir?"

"I wish to make her my wife."

"Great God!" exclaimed the older man in a voice equally divided between horror and astonishment. "How dare you, sir? You amaze me beyond measure with your infernal impudence."

"Excuse me, Mr. Maitland," interposed Armstrong quickly and with great spirit and determination, "but where I come from we don't allow anybody to talk to us in this way. You are Enid's father and a much older man than I, but I can't permit you to——"

"Sir," said astounded Maitland drawing himself up at this bold flouting, "you may be a very worthy young man, I have no doubt of it, but it is out of the question. My daughter—"

Again a less excited hearer might have noticed the emphasis in the pronoun—

"Why, she is half-way engaged to me now," interrupted the younger man with a certain contemptuous amusement in his voice. "Look here, Mr. Maitland, I've knocked around this world a good deal. I know what's what. I know all about you eastern people and I don't fancy you any more than you fancy us. Miss Enid is a little different, that's all and that is why I want her. I'm well able to take care of her, too; I don't know what you've got or how you got it, but I can come near laying down dollar for dollar with you, and mine's all clean money—mines, cattle, lumber—and it's all good money. I made it myself. I left her two weeks ago with her promise that she would think very seriously of my suit. After I came back to Denver—I was called east—I made up my mind that I'd come here when I'd finished my business and have it out with you. Now you can treat me like a dog if you want to, but if you expect to keep peace in the family you'd better not, for I tell you plainly, whether you give your consent or not, I mean to win her. All I want is her consent, and I've pretty nearly got that."

Mr. Stephen Maitland was black with anger at this clear, unequivocal, determined statement of the case from Armstrong's point of view.

"I would rather see her dead," he exclaimed with angry stubbornness, "than married to a man like you. How dare you force yourself into my house and insult me in this way? Were I not an old man I would show you—would give you a taste of your own—er."

The old man's white mustache fair-

"What Is It?" He Asked Eagerly.

ly quivered with what he believed to be righteous indignation. He stepped over to the other and looked hard at him, his eyes blazing, his ruddy cheeks redder than ever. The two men confronted each other unflinchingly for a moment, then Mr. Maitland touched a bell button in the wall by his side. Instantly the footman made his appearance.

"James," said the old man, his voice shaking and his knees trembling with passion, which he did not quite succeed in controlling, despite a desperate effort. "Show this—er—gentleman the door. Good morning, sir; our first and last interview is over."

He bowed with ceremonious politeness as he spoke, becoming more and more composed as he felt himself mastering the situation. And Armstrong, to do him justice, knew a gentleman when he saw him, and secretly admired the older man and began to feel a touch of shame at his own rude way of putting things.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the footman, breaking the awkward silence, "but here is a telegram that has just come, sir."

There was nothing for Armstrong to do or say. Indeed, having expressed himself so unrestrainedly to his rapidly-increasing regret, as the old man took the telegram he turned away in considerable discomfiture. James bowing before him at the door opening into the hall and following him as he slowly passed out. Mr. Stephen Maitland mechanically and with great deliberation and with no premonition of evil tidings, tore open the yellow envelope and glanced at the dispatch. Neither the visitor nor the footman had got out of sight or hearing when they heard the old man groan and fall back helplessly into a chair. Both men turned and ran back to the door, for there was that in the exclamation which gave rise to instant apprehension. Stephen Maitland now, as white as death, sat collapsed in the chair gasping for breath, his hand on his heart; the telegram lay open on the floor. Armstrong recognized the seriousness of the situation, and in three steps was by the other's side.

"What is it?" he asked eagerly, his hatred and resentment vanishing at the sight of the old man's ghastly, stricken countenance.

"Enid!" gasped her father. "I said I would rather see her—dead, but—it is not true—I—

James Armstrong was a man of prompt decision, without a moment's hesitation he picked up the telegram; it was full of explicity, thus it read:

"We were encamped last week in the mountains. Enid went down the canon for a day's fishing alone. A sudden cloudburst filled the canon, washed away the camp. Enid undoubtedly got caught in the torrent and was drowned. We have found some of her clothing, but not her body. Have searched every foot of the canon. Think body has got into the lake, now frozen, snow falling, mountains impassable; will search for her in the spring when the winter breaks. I am following this telegram in person by the first train. Would rather have died a thousand deaths than had this happen. God help us.

"ROBERT MAITLAND."

Armstrong read it, stared at it a moment, frowning heavily, passed it over to the footman and turned to the stricken father.

"Old man, I loved her," he said, simply. "I love her still; I believe that she loves me. They haven't found her body, clothes mean nothing. I'll find her, I'll search the mountains until I do. Don't give way; something tells me that she's alive, and I'll find her."

"If you do," said the broken old man, crushed by the swift and awful response to his thoughtless exclamation, "and she loves you, you shall have her for your wife."

"It doesn't need, that to make me find her," answered Armstrong grimly, "she is a woman, lost in the mountains in the winter, alone. They shouldn't have given up the search. I'll find her as there is a God above me whether she's for me or not."

A good deal of a man, this James Armstrong of Colorado, in spite of many things in his past of which he thought so little that he lacked the grace to be ashamed of them. Stephen Maitland looked at him with a certain respect and a growing hope, as he stood there in the library, stern, resolute, strong.

Perhaps——

CHAPTER IX.

"Over the Hills and Far Away."

Recognition—or some other more potent instantaneous force—brought the woman to a sitting position. The man drew back to give her freedom of action, as she lifted herself on her hands. It was moments before complete consciousness of her situation came to her. The surprise was yet too great, she saw things dimly through a whirl of driving rain, of a rushing mighty wind, of a seething sea of water, but presently it was all plain to her again. She had caught no fair view of the man who had shot the bear as he splashed through the creek and tramped across the rocks and trees down the canon, at least she had not seen him full face, but she recognized him immediately. The thought tinged with color for a moment her pallid cheek.

"I fell into the torrent," she said feebly, putting her hand to her head and striving by speech to put aside that awful remembrance.

"You didn't fall in," was the answer, "it was a cloudburst, you were caught in it."

"I didn't know."

"Of course not, how should you?"

"And how came I here?"

"I was lucky enough to pull you out."

"Did you jump into the flood for me?"

The man nodded.

"That's twice you have saved my life this day," said the girl, forcing herself, womanlike, to the topic that she hated.

"It's nothing," deprecated the other.

"It may be nothing to you, but it is a great deal to me," was the answer "And now what is to be done?"

"We must get out of her at once," said the man. "You need shelter food, a fire. Can you walk?"

"I don't know."

"Let me help you." He rose to his feet, reached down to her, took her hands in the strong grasp of his own and raised her lightly to her feet in an effortless way which showed his great strength. She did not more than put the weight of her body slightly on her left foot when a spasm of pain shot through her, she swerved and would have fallen had he not caught her. He sat her gently on the rock.

"My foot," she said piteously. "I don't know what's the matter with it."

Her high boots were tightly laced of course, but he could see that her left foot had been badly mauled or sprained; already the slender ankle was swelling visibly. He examined it swiftly a moment. It might be a sprain, it might be the result of some violent thrust against the rocks, some whirling tree trunks might have caught and crushed her foot, but there was no good in speculating as to causes, the present patent fact was that she could not walk; all the rest was at that moment unimportant. This unfortunate accident made him the more anxious to get her to a place of shelter without delay. It would be necessary to take off her boot and give the wounded member proper treatment. For the present the tight shoe acted as a bandage, which was well.

When the man had withdrawn himself from the world, he had inwardly resolved that no human being should ever invade his domain or share his solitude, and during his long sojourn in the wilderness his determination had not weakened. Now his coming desire was to get this woman whom fortune—good or ill!—had thrown upon his hands to his house without delay. There was nothing he could do for her out there in the rain. Every drop of whiskey was gone, they were just two half-drowned, sodden bits of humanity cast up on that rocky shore, and one was a helpless woman.

"Do you know where your camp is?" he asked at last.

He did not wish to take her to her own camp, he had a strange instinct of possession in her. In some way he felt he had obtained a right to deal with her as he would, he had saved her life twice, once by chance, the other as the result of deliberate and heroic endeavor, and yet his honor and his manhood obliged him to offer to take her to her own people if he could. Hence the question, the answer to which he waited so eagerly.

"It's down the canon. I am one of Mr. Robert Maitland's party."

The man nodded, he didn't know Robert Maitland from Adam, and he cared nothing about him.

"How far down?" he asked.

"I don't know, how far is it from here to where you—where—where—we——"

"About a mile," he replied, quickly fully understanding her reason for faltering.

"Then I think I must have come at least five miles from the camp this morning."

"It will be four miles away, then," said the man.

The girl nodded.

"I couldn't carry you that far," he murmured half to himself; "I question if there is any camp left there anyway. Where was it, down by the water's edge?"

"Yes."

"Every vestige will have been swept away by that, look at it," he pointed over to the lake.

"What must we do?" she asked instantly, depending upon his greater strength, his larger experience, his masculine force.

"I shall have to take you to my camp."

"Is it far?"

"About a mile or a mile and a half from here."

"I can't walk that far."

"No, I suppose not. You wouldn't be willing to stay here while I went down and hunted for your camp?"

The girl clutched at him.

"I couldn't be left here for a moment alone," she said in sudden fever of alarm. "I never was afraid before, but now——"

"All right," he said, gently patting her as he would a child. "We'll go up to my camp and then I will try to find your people and——"

"But I tell you I can't walk."

"You don't have to walk," said the man.

He did not make any apology for his next action, he just stooped down and, disregarding her faint protests and objections, picked her up in his arms. She was by no means a light burden, and he did not run away with her as the heroes of romances do. But he was a man far beyond the average in strength, and with a stout heart and a resolute courage that had always carried him successfully through whatever he attempted, and he had need of all his qualities, physical and mental, before he finished that awful journey.

The woman struggled a little at first, then finally resigned herself to the situation; indeed, she thought swiftly, there was nothing else to do, she had no choice, she could not have been left alone there in the rocks in that rain, she could not walk. He was doing the only thing possible. The compulsion of the inevitable was upon them both.

They went slowly, the man often stopped for rest, at which times he would seat her tenderly upon some prostrate tree, or some rounded boulder, until he was ready to resume his task. He did not bother her with explanation, discussion or other conversation, for which she was most thankful. Once or twice during the slow progress she tried to walk, but the slightest pressure on her wounded foot nearly caused her to faint. He made no complaint about his burden and she found it, after all, pleasant to be upheld by such powerful arms; she was so sick, so tired, so worn out, and there was such assurance of strength and safety in his firm hold on her.

To be continued.